

KOHLBERG: AN ORIENTATION

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The psychology text books usually provide a bird eye view of majority of the theories provided by various psychologists. Lacks of various aspects and explanations are most prominent even in the recent text books. Sometimes a simple picture is attached to the bolded topic, and rest is left upon the reader. The comparative study of various authors of these text books yields very less fruit for a graduate student. The historical background, comparison to other theories and concepts, applications and implications, criticism and evaluation etc. thus remains in darkness. Following title tries to provide a view of the said questions to some possible extent and also provides a review of various aspects of this theory.

Introduction

Morality had always remained problem of discussion among the philosophers. Philosophers from pre Socratic times to now have given their views to the problem. Ethics is the branch of philosophy having a lot of applications in the field of social and physical sciences and it deals with the morals and values of human beings. Meanwhile, morality in psychology is seen as social appropriate and cognitive developmental aspect of human behavior, and is defined as the ability to reason out right from wrong (Frank et al, 1996).

Kohlberg's moral behavior theory which is most influential research based model (Vitz, 1994), is actually an extension to the theory of cognitive development of Jean Piaget. Piaget himself is compared to Freud; however he was concerned with the cognition and Freud with personality. So to know Kohlberg properly we have to comprehend Freud and Piaget correspondingly.

Theory

It is a three level theory, in which every level has two stages. Each level is based on the

degree to which a person conforms to conventional standards of society and each stage represents the degree of sophistication in moral reasoning. These stages according to Kohlberg are true to every individual and universal in occurrence (Berk, 2007). Also skipping and regression of these stages is considered unattainable and this claim of Kohlberg has very high stability, validity and generalization (Walker, 1982).

Kohlberg used the interview technique to take his raw material for the theory. He used a story telling method or in other words provided the subjects with some dilemmas and then asked them question regarding the information in the dilemmas. A suitable dilemma regarding the property right and value of human life conflict with the theoretical explanation may be a good example to understand the theory. The dilemma is:

It was a woman in Europe who was dying of a special type of cancer, which can be cured by a recently discovered drug. The drug priced around \$200 but the discoverer charged \$2000 and for a small dose. The husband (Heinz) of that woman borrowed money but failed to get said amount. He went to the druggist to ask him to sell him at a low price or allow him on credit. But the druggist refused, so the Heinz got desperate and broke into the shop to steal the drug for his wife. Should the Heinz have done that?

The child in the first level namely *pre conventional morality's* first stage finds value in external events. More precisely subjects assumes that powerful authorities had hand down a fixed set of rules which he or she must unquestionably obey. In the given dilemma, the Heinz was wrong to steal the drug because *it is*

against law, they will reason. On elaboration the child usually responds on the basis of consequences involved, explaining stealing is bad and you will get punished. In the second stage of this level subjects show that there is not one right view that is handed down by the authorities; what would be right for the Heinz, in the given dilemma, depends upon his interest. In other words why is he stealing? So there arises a space in this stage for the reasoning, and ends seeing it by consequences.

In both stages subjects see actions on the basis of consequences, but in both stages it is perceived differently. In stage 1 it is perceived on the basis of rightness or wrongness. In contrast to it, it is totally a risk in the second stage that one naturally wants to avoid. In stage 2 there is a notion of *fair exchange*; *if you scratch my back I will scratch yours*. Also in this stage subjects talk like an isolated individual rather than as a member of society.

Moving to the second level namely *conventional morality*, Kohlberg asserts that subjects try to perform right roles. In stage 3 Heinz was right because it was necessary to save his wife and every one would have done this, assuming conventionality and generalizing it. Also, in this stage the subjects believe that people should live up to the expectations of the family and community and behave in good ways. Good interpersonal relationship means having good motives and feelings such as love, empathy, trust and empathy of others. In contrast to the case of the Heinz the subjects believed that the druggist should be punished. Thus, stage 3 reasons more about the family or friendship, where one can make real effort to know each other and try to help.

Stage 4, the subjects become more broadly concerned with *society as a whole*. The subjects maintain and lay emphasis on obeying law, respecting authority, and performing duties so that the social order is maintained. Now about the story of Heinz, many subjects say they understand that Heinz's motives were good, but they can't condone the theft. They reasoned

that if all people do these things, the society will result in chaos and couldn't function properly. This stage makes them fully fledged members of society. Thus reasoning is developed in the subjects in contrast to the stage 1.

The next level is named *post conventional* as the subject shares the standards rights and duties kept by the authorities. Similarly, the two stages 5 and 6 subject again argues in favor of him, but in a way that both the rights of Heinz and law should be saved. They assert that, it is the right of Heinz's wife to live and the right of Heinz to save his wife, so theft is in a way justified, but not completely as they also assert that the judge should keep both the sides of coin in view. Heinz, the druggist and the wife would take the role of each other and stop behaving like ignorant; justice will imply himself in a fair full way and to all. But a loop hole of this level is that it may lead to civil disobedience and social anarchy in a way that everyone will measure himself and others according to his norms.

Cognitive Aspects of the Theory

The theory is mostly seen belonging to child development, which to some extent is true but confining it to the field results in reducing its generality. Some of the possible reason might be the context in which it was written. Kohlberg considered both cognition and perspective necessary but not sufficient for the moral development (Walker, 1980).

The perception of the environment (like family) is also important in the moral development of a child but again perception is multiple processing which involves reasoning, decision making and problem solving etc. In more precise words remaining at the path of totem and leaving taboo is all due to cognition. However this assertion might be against the will of the Kohlberg, as he considers self intrinsically entirely good for which he is refuted by various theorists like D.T. Campbell 1974.

Moral development theory considers form and process of thought not decision made (Vitz, 1994). In other words he was concerned with process of thought not content of thought. This would result in seeing the dominant pattern of individual moral behavior.

Vitz also pointed out that Kohlberg used proposed cognitive reasoning which mainly involves stories not prevalent in the society. Subject is considered imaginative at most levels and thus Kohlberg overlooks empathy.

Kohlberg vs. Piaget

This segment provides you a comparison between the two theorists. Before that it should be known that Kohlberg's theory is considered an elaboration of Piaget and Piaget is compared to his predecessor Freud. However, Freud laid emphasis on the psychosexuality and Piaget and Kohlberg saw it as an intrinsic ability with cognition of environment.

Both the theorist pleaded sequential stage system in human development process. The methods used were observation; controlled or uncontrolled, experiments and interviews. The sequence of stages however, is considered lacking wholeness by researchers like Santrock, Mac Rae and Fishkin etc.

Various studies have shown us that Kohlberg predicts adult ethical behavior efficiently and in contrast to it Piaget predicts children moral behavior (Siegal, 1980). This distinction appeals the generality and validity of both the theories and also that Kohlberg's theory is the improvisation of Piaget's.

Applications

There can be many applications of this theory, one possible application which is much political in sense, is the abandoning of indoctrination of morals in the society which possibly will effect pluralistic society or in other words raise the value of democracy in various cultures.

Another application of this theory is to see the magnitude of moral development in delinquents and offender of various ages (Carter, 1986). Carter in his paper has referred to various researches to show us the comparison of rate of moral development in delinquents and no delinquents and offenders also.

Last but not least application of this theory is using it to enhance family relations by giving value clarification and self – awareness with frame work which enhances interpersonal dynamics and detracts intrapersonal (Englund, 1980).

Evaluation and Criticism

In pre conventional stage individual has yet to internalize the moral values, in conventional internalization has taken place and moral judgments are done on this internalization and lastly internalization has fully developed (Lotfabadi, 2008). This order provides the development of morality by reasoning. But the rate of passage of stages varies from individual to individual due external factors, and individual can show mixture of two stages at same (Vitz, 1994).

Kohlberg's notion of right action is universalistic and applicable to all (Blum, 1988). He believes that morality is universal in nature. There are no possible differences with respect to any difference creating factor be it culture or race or gender etc.

This theory keeps the spirit of democracy alive. The indoctrination of morals as seen in various cultures is avoided by Kohlberg (Vitz, 1994). The possible application of this aspect leads to the tolerance in ethics of a pluralistic society and individual sees right or wrong by his cognition and. The intellectual venture of Kohlberg can be seen here in this assertion.

Masculinity is predominant in this theory as in experiment all 72 subjects were male in gender.

He later added delinquents, girls and young subjects (Crain, 1980). This point was produced by his Harvard colleague Carol Gilligan (1977, 1982, and 1987). Gilligan has claimed that preoccupation of values kept females low at various stages found in his theory.

Kohlberg model is also alleged of atheism as he placed autonomous individual as the center of ethics not authority of god (Vitz, 1994). Obedience in this sense is to the individual and not God. This is also evident in the case of Richard who was asked about mercy killing but he answered that it is wrong and God give life to man and he/ she should spare it. Here interpreted the emphasis on God by obedience to self and a belief currently held by many Americans.

This model also shows too much dependency on the language as seen by Schweder (1982). To answer the various questions verbal sophistication is necessary and the understanding of pragmatics of child as well adult language should also be kept in mind. However this thing was not found in Kohlberg's interpretation.

This model is also criticized of having low standardization and thus low reliability and validity. The moral maturity scale after 25 years of research has low standardization resulting in low existence of Kohlbergian stages.

Vitz (1994) also pointed out a moral judgment score dependence on educational levels. In this way one who is doing Ph.D. will top the scale and a junior high school student will be the last. This reduction to the scores will predict behavior leading to bias. The cultures where more emphasis is laid on men education according to Kohlberg's stages would have husbands more moral than woman. It should be noted here that a relation is made between morality and intellectuality.

Another possible flaw in the model is failing to address sexual morality, which during his time were more prevalent (Vitz, 1994). As we said

the model keeps the spirit of democracy alive and doesn't believe in indoctrination of morals, so on more precision it embraces liberalism to much extent. Take for example the case of abortion which during Kohlberg's time was most prevalent, but he as a moral theorist didn't provide any dilemma regarding it. The failure hurts the internalization of stage 6 principle of justice as an external agency is needed to answer the problem.

Besides the above mentioned censure there are lots of notions in the theory on which analysis is necessary. After the production of theory Kohlberg spent the rest of his life time in writing rebuttals to his critics. Nevertheless he was not able to provide possible explanation to critiques laid in front of him.

Conclusion

In the end, we provided a precision to the theory but we here humbly admit that this paper is a compilation from works mentioned in the reference part of this paper. We also admit there are various issues which needs a detailed account if addressed, remained untouched due to our little resource and abilities. This paper might be a simple orientation to the pros and cons of theory of Lawrence Kohlberg.

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